

History of Islam

Outline

Thesis: Islam can be summarized in three periods of time that are “The Time of Ingratitude,” Muhammad’s life and story, and the sects and laws that developed after the death of the prophet.

- I. The Time of Ingratitude (Al-jahiliyah)
 - A. Political order and society
 - B. Religious order: the “Ka’bah” and its idols
- II. Muhammad’s life and story
 - A. Early years of Muhammad
 - 1. Muhammad’s childhood
 - 2. Laylat al-Qadr
 - B. Later years of Muhammad
 - 1. The flee to Yathrib (al-Hijrah)
 - 2. The success of returning to Mecca
- III. Sects and laws of Islam
 - A. Sects of Islam
 - 1. Sunni
 - 2. Shiites
 - 3. Druze
 - B. Laws

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The most divine statement or “Shahada” in Islam is “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger” (Fieser, 1998 p.373). Islam was established in Arabia and it follows all the rules given by God through Muhammad, the prophet (Rahman, 1996 p.1). Islam is an Arabic term that signifies “surrender” in general terms. However, it signifies giving up fully to God in its exact religious meaning (Rahman, 1996 p.1; Fieser, 1998 p.373). Muslims are those who practice this religion or those who give up themselves to God. For them, God is the ultimate creator who will honor the good and reject the evil (Fieser, 1998 p.373). The Qur’an which contains 114 chapters is Islam’s most holy book. It contains approximately everything that Muhammad, the Messenger, said and saw during the last 22 years of his life (Rahman, 1996 p.1). However, Islam can be summarized in three periods of time that are “The Time of Ingratitude,” Muhammad’s life and story, and the sects and laws that developed after the death of the prophet.

Before the coming of Muhammad and even before Islam started, there was a time that was called the “Time of Ingratitude.” The “Time of Ingratitude” or “al-jahiliyah” in Arabic is the time when people, according to the Qur’an, did not know God. At that time, most Arabs and Arab tribes lived on trade with the empires surrounding them. However, many trading cities like Petra had died and only famous cities like Mecca survived since all trading men passed through it. Mecca had two main tribes controlling it and they were in constant war. These two tribes were the “Quraysh” and the “Khuza’a.” Religiously, Arabs who lived in Mecca believed in many gods and especially the “jinn” which is believed to be a supernatural force guarding or living in a place. They believed in evil “jinns” and good ones. “Hubal”, god of the moon, was the most acknowledged. Among him, Meccans believed in three additional goddesses. However, Arabs also believed in a unique father God, Allah, who according to

their beliefs ruled over all the other gods and was the creator of everything. In this time, there were many Jews and Christians who fled authorities. Mainly, Mecca's religious activities focused on the "Ka'bah"(Fieser, 1998, pp.373-374).

Muslims say that Muhammad, who is also called Prophet, was the man who preached God's will on Earth. Muhammad, born in 570 CE, was a descendant of the Hashimite family part of the Quraysh tribe. The name "Muhammad" means "highly praised". Muhammad's father died before his son was born. Then his mother died when he was still six years old. According to Arab tradition, Muhammad's grandfather had to take care of him, so he, in his turn, made a Bedouin mother take care of the child. Unfortunately, his grandfather died after two years leaving him with his uncle. As Muhammad was growing up, he usually accompanied his uncle on trips and caravans. A story told that a Christian monk who saw the 12-year-old Muhammad in Syria on a trip with his uncle predicted that he would be a future prophet. Later, when he reached 25 years old, Muhammad drove a caravan for a 40-year-old wealthy widow whose name was Khadija. She later became his wife and they had four daughters and three sons. The sons died while they were still children. When Fatima, the most know daughter of Muhammad grew up, she married Muhammad's cousin, Ali. Ali later ruled Islam after Muhammad's death (Fieser, 1998, pp.374-375).

Islam started on the Night of Power or Laylat al-Qadr. On that night, the 40-year-old Muhammad was having a retreat in a cave near Mecca. He then had a vision from Gabriel, Allah's messenger (Fieser, 1998, p.375; Rahman, 1996, p.7). He first thought that he was mad, but with the help of his wife and 50 believers in what happened he was encouraged. From then and on, all Muhammad's thoughts, speeches, visions and revelations were memorized. After the Prophet died, everything was recorded by others in the Qur'an. As Muhammad shook and sweated, he revealed in "rhymed prose" only.

In 622 CE, the 52-year-old Muhammad fled to Yathrib because Meccans didn't believe in him. Muhammad changed Yathrib's name to Medina after he entered it. Medina signifies the "city of the Prophet" (Fieser, 1998, p.376). This fleeing was then called the Hijrah (Rahman, 1996, p.7) which is the starting point of the Islamic Lunar Calendar. After eight years from the Hijrah, Muhammad successfully returned to Mecca in 630 CE making no choice for inhabitants but accepting him. When he entered Mecca, Muhammad went to the Ka'bah and destroyed all its 360 idols. In the tenth year after the Hijrah, Muhammad made a final announcement at the Ka'bah and then he died in his second wife's house where he was buried. Muhammad's second wife was called A'isha. The Ka'bah was called the "Sacred" or "Haram" (Rahman, 1996, p.7; Fieser, 1998, p.377). Mostly, Muhammad's teachings were based on "goodness, omnipotence, and unity of God and the need for generosity and justice in human relations" (Rahman, 1996, p.7).

After Muhammad's death, sects developed in Islam and each had some laws different from the others. Mainly, there are two sects in Islam that were divided after the death of Muhammad. One of the two sects is the Sunni that follows the preaching of the Prophet and the shrine given by God through him. Sunnis complete name is Ahl al-Sunnah wa l-Hadith. Hadith means the Qur'an, but Sunnis call it like that since it is transmitted through verbal language, thus any error could occur. It is not considered perfect for that special reason, but it is an essential source for Islam's philosophy (Rahman, 1996, p.1-2). Sunnis believe in four Caliphs. Caliphs are holy men who followed Muhammad totally in order. The second sect is the Shi'a or Shiites who followed Ali, Muhammad's cousin who married Fatima, and Abu Bakr, a merchant (Fieser, 1998, p.378). Shiites consider themselves holding authority more than Sunnis because they are related to the prophet by his daughter Fatima. In fact, this is one of the main reasons why Sunnis and Shiites split after the Prophet's death (Alam, 1999). Most Shiites are "Twelvers" or they believe in twelve holy leaders or "Imams" after the

prophet. Others are “Seveners” or “Ismailis” since they followed Imam Ismail rather than Musa-l-Kazim for “Twelvers”. Druze came from “Seveners”, but they do not consider themselves as a sect of Shiites since they followed Caliph Al-Hakim who was living in Egypt and is thought to be reincarnated as a child in Iran (Rahman, 1996, p.10). Another sect under Shiites are the “Fivers”, “Fivers” also came from “Twelvers”. They split because “Fivers” believed in Imam Zayadis as the fifth Imam instead of Muhammad Al-Baqir for “Twelvers”. Shiites have about 40 political sects that developed through years. However, Sunnis consist 90% of the world’s Muslims and 10% only for Shiites located mostly in Iran (Fieser, 1998, pp378-379).

Muslims have five main rules or “Pillars of Islam”. The five pillars are the profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage at the “Ka’bah”. First of all, Muslims should confess the “Shahada” or the holy creed as a profession of faith at least once in their life. Second, Muslims should pray five times daily, two before noon and three times after. They should pray face to Mecca. Third, Muslims should also pay a definite amount of money or “zakat” each according to his wealthiness. It is not obligatory anymore nowadays, but most Muslims still consider it as a duty. Almsgiving is basically for helping the poor and many other social necessities. Fourth, Muslims also should fast on Ramadan, a month on the Islamic Lunar Calendar. Fifth and finally, Wealthy Muslims are obliged by the Qur’an to practice pilgrimage at the Ka’bah in Mecca as many times as they are able to. Islam has the Islamic law which is given by the Qur’an and is called “Shari’a”. The “Shari’a” tells about Islam’s role in society. For example, the “Jihad” is one Islamic law that signifies holy war. In this war, any useful means of reform are used (Rahman, 1996, pp.3-6).

After all the years of ingratitude, one can say that finally Man reached a fixed philosophy in religion. All of the religions nowadays focus on one fixed philosophy: “there is

no God but Allah” which signifies that there is only one God who is the ultimate creator of everything and who cannot not exist.

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